

San Juan County Forage Fish Assessment Project: Science and Citizen Involvement

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Abstract

This study consisted of a field survey of beaches potentially used for spawning by surf smelt (*Hypomesus pretiosus*) and Pacific sand lance (*Ammodytes hexapterus*) in San Juan County, Washington. This was a cooperative study of the San Juan County Marine Resources Committee, the Friends of the San Juans, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFD) and UW Friday Harbor Labs. Previous investigations by WDFW had identified spawning on county beaches, but surveys were prematurely terminated. This study extended the surveys on a countywide basis to identify beaches that qualified for protection under the Washington State Hydraulic Code Rules.

Results to date have verified previous results and have extended the amount of known spawning habitat. 19 new surf smelt spawning beaches have been identified, resulting in a total of 32 beaches with documented spawning by surf smelt.

Friends of the San Juans and citizen volunteers are surveying beaches throughout the archipelago to identify which areas are spawning sites for forage fish--a critical food source for a wide variety of species, including endangered or threatened salmon stocks. As a result of surveys to date, a total of 9.71 linear miles of forage fish spawning beach are afforded protection under Hydraulic Code Rules.